

## Greenwood County Aviation History

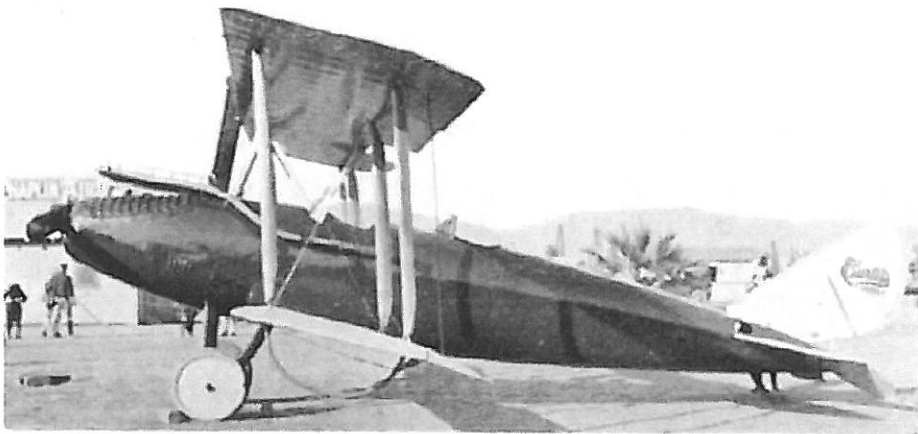
By Broadus M. (Bo) Bowman, 2006

### The Barnstormers Were First

The first record of aviation in Greenwood is when flyers known as “barnstormers” came to the area to perform stunts to attract attention and then offer passenger rides. Barnstormers would rent a local field for their operations and charge about \$5 to \$10 for rides. The earliest barnstormers in the Greenwood area were the “Buckeye Flyers” from Akron, Ohio. They arrived in the spring of 1921. They flew from a field owned by D. B. Alexander on the “Dixie Highway” (U.S. Route 25) north of Greenwood. They charged \$15 per ride for two passengers.

On March 3, 1921 a Buckeye Flyers pilot flew one of their airplanes with two Index Journal employees to make the first delivery of the Index Journal “by air” to Ninety-Six, SC. The pilot of the Curtiss Oriole open cockpit biplane was H. L. Walters. His two passengers, sitting in the forward cockpit, were Society Editor Sarah Duncan and City Editor Louis Wright. Mr. Walters guided the plane over the southeast bound railroad tracks to Ninety-Six, while his two passengers tossed out newspapers, tightly bound with a rubber band, over the countryside. Reaching Ninety-Six they swooped down low over the Public Square, circled twice, and dropped a bundle of newspapers on each pass. People on the ground scrambled for the newspapers. Children were thrilled and horses were startled. A quote from the March 4, 1921 Index Journal from an article reporting the event reads in part as follows:

*“On the way the countryside was bombed with Index Journals, papers being tightly wrapped and bound with rubber bands. When thrown out they descended with the speed of a projectile but no casualties were reported from the raid.”*



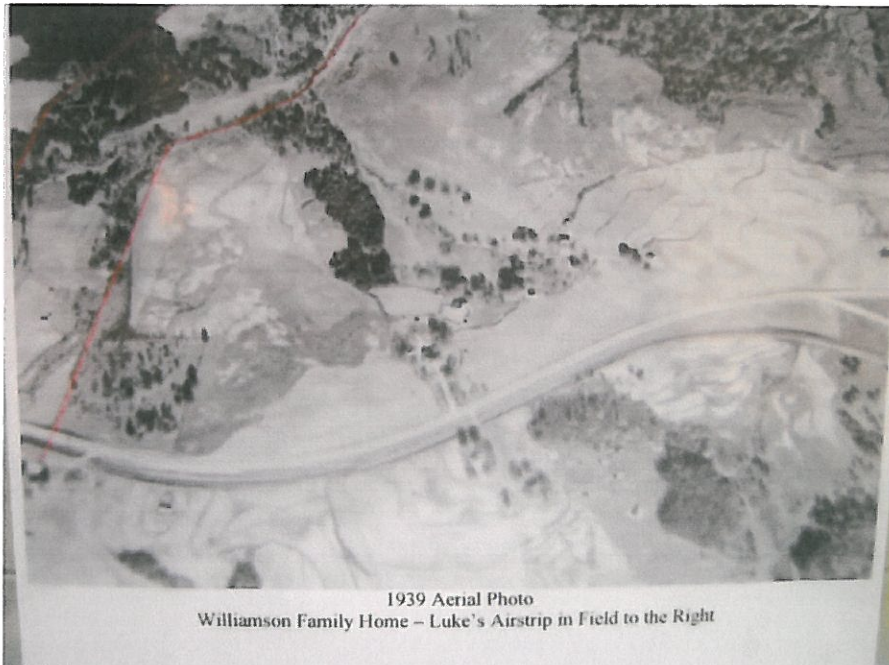
Curtiss Oriole Airplane similar to the one flown by H. L. Walters

### First Official Landing Strip in Area

The first “official landing strip” in the area was on the Williamson farm, located just off what is now SC Route 34 east of Ninety-Six. This landing strip was created in the late 1920’s for the Williamson’s son, John Henry “Luke” Williamson to land on when he flew back from his Army Air Corp training base to his home. The field with the landing strip was to the right of the house. It is now (2006) covered with pine trees. Luke was a student, and later an instructor, at Brooks and Kelly Fields in Texas with the Army Air Cadets. SC State Senator, John W. Drummond, remembers as a youth watching “John Henry” perform in the skies over Ninety Six and then rushing over to the farm to see him land. Coincidentally, Senator Drummond now (2006) owns the land on which this landing strip was located. (More will be given on the notoriety of John H. “Luke” Williamson later.)



2005 Photo of former Williamson house



1939 Aerial Photo  
Williamson Family Home – Luke’s Airstrip in Field to the Right

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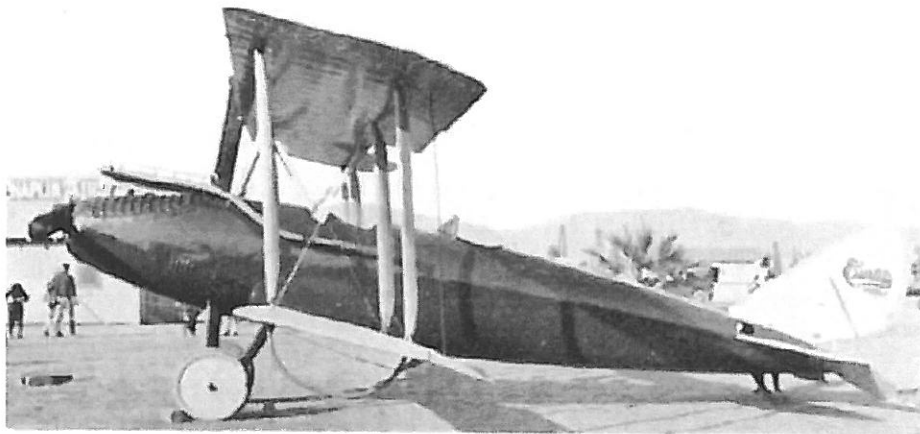
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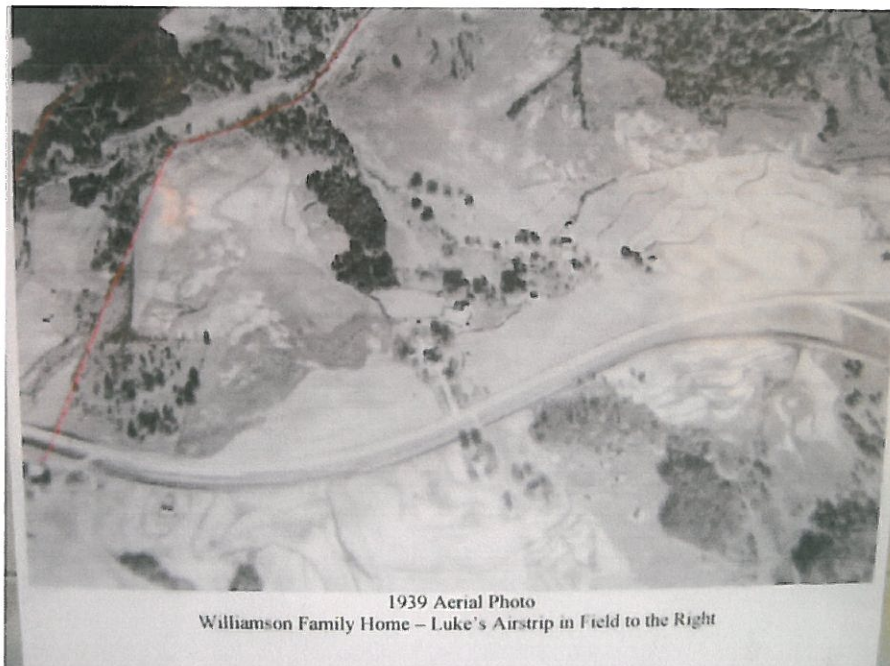


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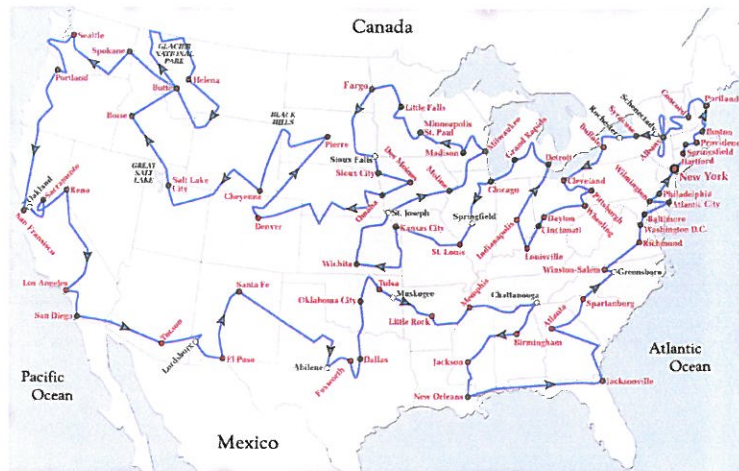




2003 Aerial Photo of former Williamson House  
and location of former air strip to the right (now pines)

### **“The Spirit” Comes to Greenwood**

Charles Lindbergh circled Greenwood in the “Spirit of St. Louis” and dropped a letter of greetings on October 12, 1927. Lindbergh completed his crossing of the Atlantic from New York to Paris in May of 1927. Later that year, Lindbergh toured the country for three months on behalf of the Guggenheim Foundation to create increased interest in, and raise funds for, aviation. He touched down at 92 airports, at least at one location in every state. On his flight from Atlanta to Spartanburg on October 12, he circled both Athens, GA and Greenwood. Lindbergh circled Greenwood in response to a special request from Greenwood city officials. He circled twice over the center of the city and the Fair Grounds. This event officially opened the 1927 Piedmont Fair. On his second circle, he dropped his letter which was enclosed in a cloth bag. The letter fell on the ground in front of Efird’s Department Store and was retrieved by James Pinson, son of Mr. and Mrs. J. L. Pinson of South Main St. It was immediately put on display in a window of Efird’s store and became “one of the most alluring attractions in town” according to the October 13 Index Journal. Unfortunately, the whereabouts and/or existence of that letter today are unknown, so it is apparently lost to the city of Greenwood. Lindbergh continued on from Greenwood to land and sleep that night in Spartanburg.



Map of Lindbergh's Guggenheim Tour

A vintage newspaper advertisement for the Piedmont Fair, featuring a large illustration of a biplane at the top. The text reads: "ON WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 12th, BETWEEN NOON And 1 P. M. COLONEL CHAS. A. LINDBERGH America's Most Beloved Hero and the World's Greatest Master of the Air is THE SPIRIT OF SAINT LOUIS—THE FIRST PLANE TO CROSS THE ATLANTIC WILL FLY LOW OVER GREENWOOD AND THE FAIR GROUNDS To Officially Open The 1927 PIEDMONT FAIR". Below this, it states: "Do not fail to be in the Fair grounds at the above hour on Wednesday when you will get a good view of the most talked of plane the world has yet produced, and the way and only LINDBERGH—the world's most celebrated aviator who by his daring and skill first flew from New York to Paris, across the great expanse of the Atlantic Ocean. The man and the plane who won America's name in indelible letters in the sky and brought the world a new era of flying will be seen." The advertisement also lists various attractions: "LARGE AND VARIED EXHIBITS OF ALL FARM PRODUCTS", "HORSE RACING By Fast Sporting Machines WEDNESDAY and THURSDAY", "FRIDAY IS SCHOOL DAY", "PEEPLESS EXPOSITION SHOWS", "IS CLEAN ATTRACTIONS", "FOOTBALL GAME Friday, October 14th BAILEY MILITARY INSTITUTE CLINTON HI", "BOYS RACES FRIDAY", "BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS ARE ALL IN FINE SHAPE". At the bottom, it says: "REMEMBER THE DAYS AND DATES WEDNESDAY-THURSDAY-FRIDAY OCT. 12-13-14th. Let Nothing Keep You Away".

Index Journal page advertising Lindbergh's coming visit





Index Journal page reporting Lindbergh's visit



"The Spirit of St. Louis" landed in Spartanburg after circling Greenwood

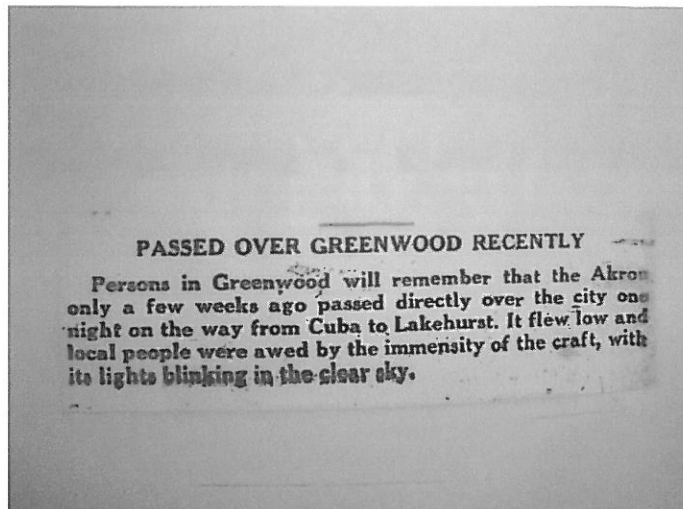


## USS Akron

Another notable “visitor” in the skies over Greenwood was the U. S. Navy’s 785 ft. long dirigible airship the USS Akron. It was the largest airship in the world at that time. One night in January 1933 the Akron passed over the city on its way from Cuba back to its base in Lakehurst, NJ. Its lights were ablaze and it was seen by many local residents. This was only about 3 months before it was destroyed in a storm off of the Atlantic coast. A total of 73 persons perished in that accident. There were 3 survivors.



The Akron in flight over New York City Harbor



A short article from the April 4, 1933 Index Journal the day after the Akron was destroyed in the Atlantic indicating its earlier flight over Greenwood

### **First Greenwood Municipal Airport**

In May 1929 the Index Journal printed the Following:

*"Greenwood is one of 22 cities in the U. S. that have announced in the last two weeks their intention of establishing municipal airports, thus showing that Greenwood is alive to the growth of aviation."*

The first Greenwood Municipal Airport was dedicated on the evening of June 19, 1929. Interestingly, on that particular day, this event took second billing to the Georgia and Florida (G & F) Railroad. This day was also "G & F Day", celebrating the arrival of this railroad as the fifth railroad through the City of Greenwood. However, the rest of the week, attention was centered on the airport and stunt flying and parachuting exhibitions performed by the "Charlotte Flying Circus". The airport was located on Power House property, just off Hodges Rd. (now Montague Ave.). The runway ran east-west from Montague (just across from Roseland Ave.) to what is the now the back of Northside Middle School. The runway can be seen in an attached 1939 aerial photograph.

During the week following the airport's dedication, the Charlotte Flying Circus continued to perform and to sell airplane rides. Featured in the performances were airmail pilot George Shealy, pilot Clyde White, and parachutist Dick Hunter. George Shealy flew his Curtis "Robin" Cabin Monoplane, which was a new and advanced model airplane at that time, and quite a treat for Greenwood residents to see. Clyde White flew a Waco 10 biplane, and Dick Hunter excited the spectators with 1000 ft. "delayed jumps". Quotes by airmail pilot George Shealy in the Index Journal included the following three:

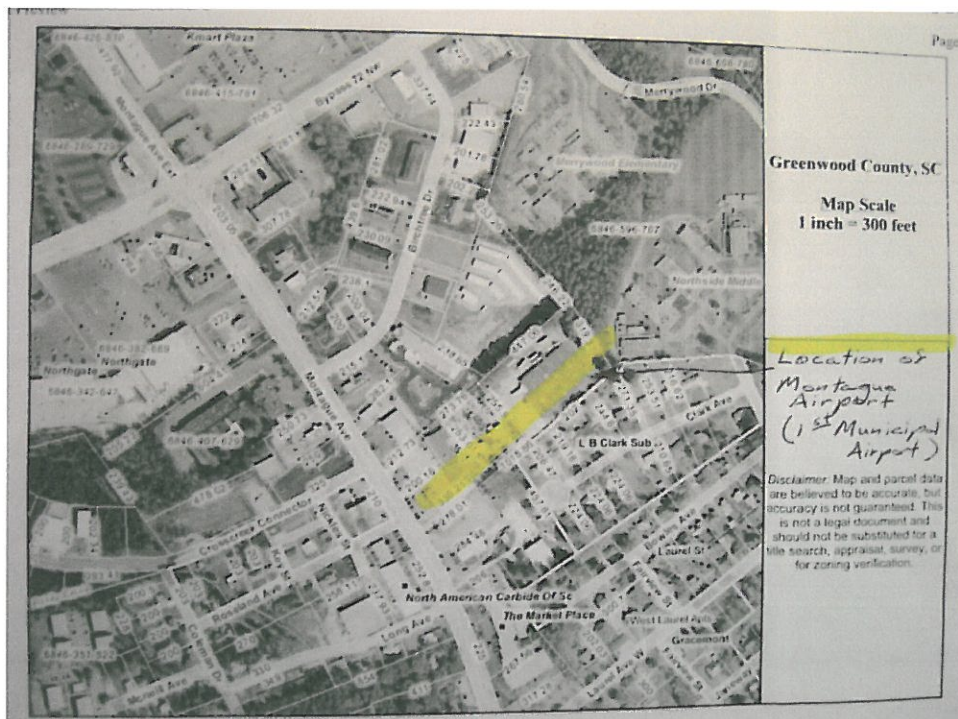
*"...the beacons guide me on my way when it is clear, but low hanging clouds sometimes create a problem in navigation."*

*"One of the most beautiful sights is to climb above the clouds at night and see the beautiful moonlight on the clouds."*

*"It is a great relief, however, to see the lights of the home port after fighting a storm for six or seven hundred miles."*



1939 Aerial Photo of First Greenwood Municipal Airport  
(from Greenwood County Courthouse)



2003 Aerial Photo of Location of First Municipal Airport  
(from Greenwood County GIS)





Curtiss "Robin" Cabin Monoplane



Picture of a Waco 10 biplane

### **Chinquapin (Second Greenwood Municipal) Airport (Johnson Field)**

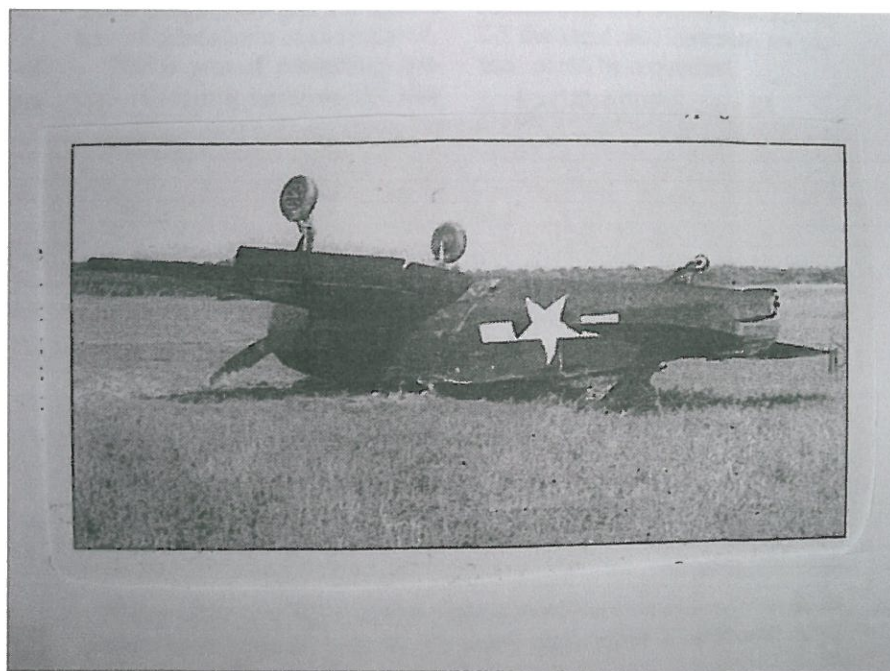
Although the airport off of Montague was probably used into the late 30's or early 40's, it was replaced a new airport on the west end of the city just off of Chinquapin Rd. This new airport, eventually referred to as Johnson Field, was constructed with funds provided by the WPA (Works Progress Administration) in the 1935-36 time period. It had two grass or dirt runways reportedly 2,400 ft. long. It appears in a 1939 aerial photograph that one of the runways also had an oval automobile racing track around it. Earl "Bunker" Smith owned a 40-horsepower Piper Cub in which he gave rides and flying lessons. A group of six young men pooled their funds, bought Smith's airplane, took flying lessons, and built the first hanger. They were responsible for the first operations at this airport. Four of the men in this group were Ed Seymour (who would later become a member of the County Airport Commission), Truman Witt, Myers Page, and Butler Culbertson. Other airplane enthusiasts at that time were B. F. McKellar, Jr., Jack Whatley, James Telford, and Homer Tribble.

After Bunker Smith left, Luther Johnson came to be the next airport operator and flight instructor (hence, Johnson Field). In 1940 a government-sponsored Civilian Air Training course was begun at this airport. The first class had approximately 30 students including young men and young women. Tracy Jackson taught ground instruction and Luther Johnson gave flying lessons. These classes were continued into the early 40's. According to Jack Northrup (presently living in FL), in 1943 this airport was used for potential Army Air Service preliminary pilot training. Jack, at only 20 years of age, along with a number of other young men, was under contract with the Army Air Service to instruct potential Air Service pilots from Erskine College. This program was part of an overall program designed to reduce the high number of "wash-outs" at the Army Air Service flight schools---many of them in Texas. Students were bused in from Erskine, given approximately ten hours of instruction, following which Jack and the other instructors would provide an evaluation of each student as to his potential to be a pilot. Those not showing good piloting potential would be recommended for navigator or bombardier school. Jack estimates as many as 100 or more students went through this program at Johnson Field. A fleet of about 15 Piper Cubs and Aeroncas, "borrowed" by the government from civilian pilots, were used for this training.

Lt. Irving Griffin of Greenwood was killed in a crash at this airport on June 14, 1946. He had flown a Navy airplane in to visit his family for the weekend. On Sunday the 14<sup>th</sup> his brother and family took him to the airport for his return trip to the Miami Naval Air Station. He departed to fly to Greenville first, apparently to refuel and get flight weather information. He returned to land again at Chinquapin while his family was still at the airport. Upon attempting to land he apparently was landing too fast, applied brakes at the end of the runway, and his airplane tilted over, landed upside down, killing him instantly. It is not known for sure why he had decided to return, but it may have been due to forecasted bad weather. He had flown air missions in the Pacific campaign of WWII.



1944 "Class" of Potential Army Air Service Cadets from Erskine at Johnson Field.



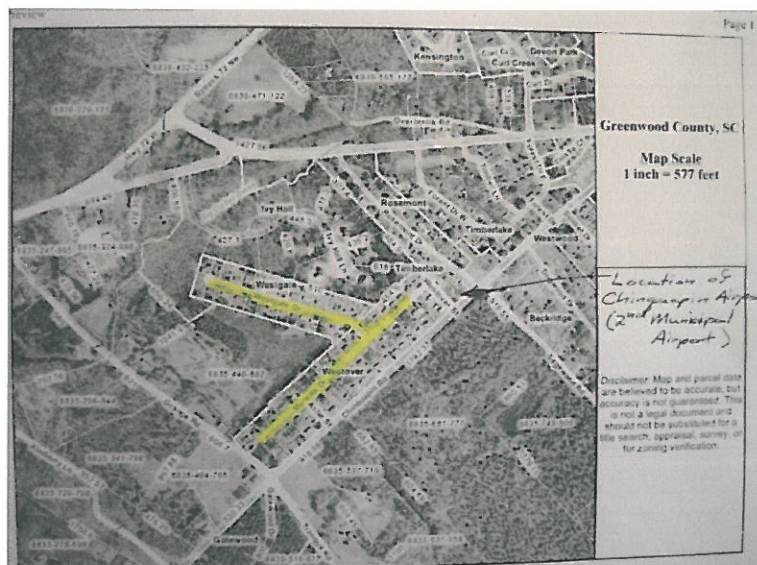
Lt. Irving Griffin's Fatal Accident at Johnson (Chinquapin) Field



The airport property was sold in 1948, and a housing development (Westgate) was eventually constructed along both runways. One runway is now Marietta Drive, and the other is Westgate Drive. The funds from the sale of the property went towards a new terminal building at the new Greenwood County Airport (formerly Coronaca Army Air Field – later discussed). The Johnson hanger and another operations building were moved to the new airport. The hangar remains today (2006).



1939 Aerial Photo of the Chinquapin Airport (Johnson Field)  
(from Greenwood County Courthouse)



2003 Aerial Photo of the location of the former Johnson Field  
(from Greenwood County GIS)

### Coronaca Army Air Field

In 1919 the Army Air Service had 69 airfields in the United States. In 1935 Congress passed the Army Air Base Bill, and in 1940 Congress appropriated money for DLAND (Development of Landing Areas for National Defense). During World War II under the DLAND program, \$3.2 Billion were expended on the development of air bases. There were 114 Army Air Bases by December 1941, with 47 more projected at that time. The number of bases peaked in 1943 at 783---345 main bases and 438 auxiliary bases. At the end of World War II, more than 500 of these bases were given to Civil Aviation.

Aviation-minded officials and citizens of Greenwood, knowing that the government was going to construct a large number of these Army Air Bases around the country, worked hard to have one of these bases located near Greenwood. Coronaca Army Air Field (CAAF) was developed north of Greenwood primarily as an auxiliary air field to the larger Army Air Base in Greenville (now Donaldson Airport). The reported cost of the Coronaca Army Air Field was \$1.75M. No aircraft were permanently based there; it was used primarily as a training field for airplane landings, including early Instrument Landing System (ILS) approaches. The base was primarily staffed with instrument technicians for the maintenance and operation of the ILS equipment, and the necessary base support personnel. It was also used as a refugee and emergency landing field, and in addition to supporting the Greenville base, it supported the Columbia AAF, the USM Air Corp, and USN Air Arm. The model of airplane landing there was primarily the B-25 bomber. On occasion, a B-25 was kept at the air field for repairs and/or engine replacement, done by mechanics from another air base. Joe Dan Elliott of Greenwood recalls the crash of a B-25 in the 1943-45 period close to the airport on the east side of now Old Laurens Rd. just north of Rock Creek. Wreckage was strewn over a large area, and three aviators were killed. The CAAF was closed as an Army Air Field soon after the end of WWII.

### **CAAF Instrument Landing System**

An Instrument Landing System (ILS), using radio frequency signals, basically provides the pilot of an airplane with electronic guidance to bring the airplane from a specified altitude safely down to near the end of the runway during weather conditions that essentially eliminate normal visibility. The system provides both lateral (left and right) and vertical (up and down) guidance, allowing the pilot to bring the airplane down through a narrowing virtual square funnel ending at the end of the runway. Such systems were in early development stages at the time of WWII and the construction of the CAAF.

The CAAF had an ILS for its eastbound Runway 8, used primarily for instrument approach training for the B-25 Pilots from the Greenville Base, although used for others as well. The operation of the CAAF system was also a factor in the development of an advanced ILS system for the Army which eventually became an international standard.

The use of an ILS at that time required all airplanes using it to enter the approach consistently. This was done by first passing over a defined point often called the "initial

394 1/2

GREENVILLE

YELLOW SECTOR

BLUE SECTOR

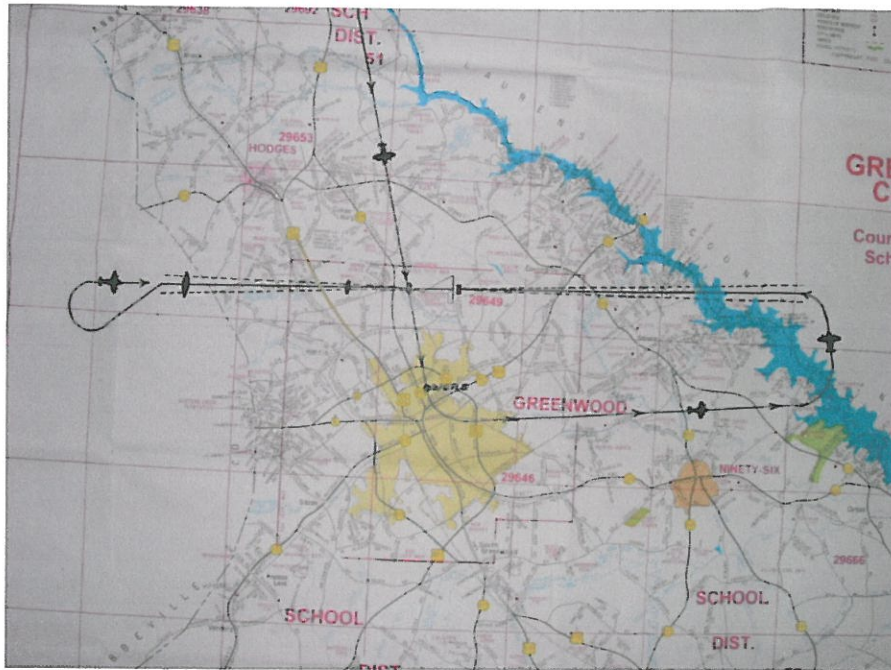
GREENWOOD

INSTRUMENT APPROACH PROCEDURE  
GREENVILLE AIR FIELD - GREENWOOD, S.C.

LOCATED IN CHANNEL X-1005 NEG

14





Overlay of CAAF Approach Procedure on 2000 Greenwood County Map

### **CAAF Monthly Reports**

The Air Force Historical Research Agency retains copies of four of the monthly reports issued by the top officer in command at the CAAF. These are for the months of October 1944, November 1944, December 1944, and January 1945. Following are some highlight items from these reports:

#### **October 1944**

- 39 enlisted men and one officer at the CAAF
- Authorized to have 49 enlisted men
- Shortage of clerk typists
- New commanding officer was Major Victor T. Kadanka
- Many attempts to obtain day room furniture and a pool table to increase moral
- Little relaxation was provided in "the neighboring town"
- Need for diversional activity of utmost importance

#### **November 1944**

- Hard-felt shortage of cooks
- No lost-time injuries
- 7 promotions to ILS Equipment Repairman
- Local interest in establishing a POW Camp at CAFF
- 918 landings and takeoffs in November
- ILS equipment in operation for 6 months
- ILS under-used---only 35 “passes” in November

#### December 1944

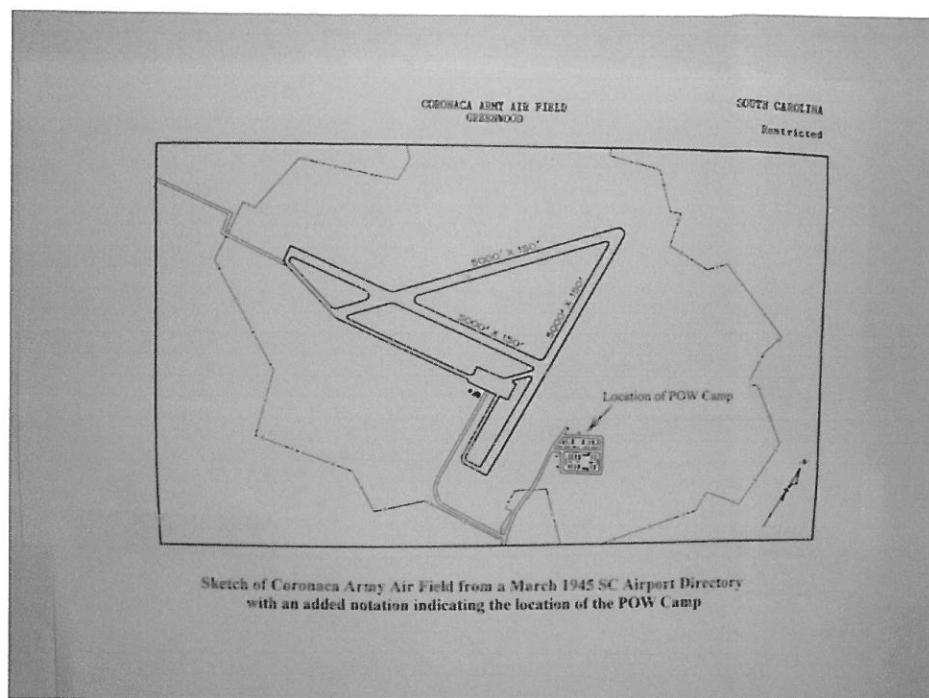
- Continued concern over ILS under-use
- Honorable mention due ILS Operators---General Hap Arnold
- Venereal Disease prevalent in area---CAAF taking precautions
- Measures underway for more recreation availability

#### January 1945

- 2,605 control tower contacts
- 2,400 takeoffs and landings
- Engine change made on 2 B-25's by outside mechanics
- 66 ILS passes
- New Mess Sergeant and increased quantity and quality of food
- CAAF favorably considered for POW Camp

#### CAAF POW Camp

There were over 20 WWII Prisoner of War (POW) Camps in SC in the early to mid 1940's. As stated in the January 1945 CAAF Monthly Report, the CAAF was favorably considered for the location of a POW Camp. Sometime shortly thereafter, a POW camp was constructed on the CAAF property. Its location was across the road (now Airport Road) southeast of the airport runways where an industrial park was eventually located (between Bucklevel and Airport Industry Roads). The POW Camp had been “pushed” by local Greenwood business men due to the local labor shortage. There were ultimately 229 prisoners at this camp. The prisoners did “forestry work”, and they were paid the same wages as our own local laborers. Mrs. Rebecca Coleman of Greenwood recalls the POW camp, and said she understood the food was excellent and that a number of the prisoners liked it here and stayed following the war.



### **Greenwood County Airport (GRD)**

After WWII local and state officials worked and lobbied hard to obtain the former Coronaca AAF for Greenwood County. It was quickly learned that an official body would have to be established to administer such an effort. The county legislative delegation had a bill passed to authorize the Greenwood Airport Commission (GAC). Original members were R. H. Hammond, Chairman, J. Motsinger, and J. L. Hollingsworth. (When the membership was increased to five in 1957, C. R. Walters and E. Seymour were added. In July 1947, the Federal Government's War Assets Administration deeded 1000 acres encompassing the airport to the county. In April 1948 an additional 500 acres were deeded to the county. It was reported in the Index Journal that when the Army Air Service moved out, they took everything movable with them. The GAC worked with the Civil Aviation Administration to obtain enough equipment such that private and commercial aviation could begin. As stated earlier, the funds from the sale of the Chinquapin Airport property went towards helping with a new airport terminal building, which was constructed with this, and other city and government funding. Luther Johnson moved his private aircraft operations to the new airport, thus becoming the first "Fixed Base Operator" (FBO), as they are called today. Subsequent "FBO's" were operated by Waymon Lanford (Lanford's Flying Service), \_\_\_\_\_, Buck Griffin, and Jerry Billings (the current Buzz Aviation operator). Airline service began in 1949. A Civil Air Patrol (CAP) unit was established in 1956 which still exists



today. In 1959 the newly formed Federal Aviation Agency (successor to the Civil Aviation Administration) installed and commissioned a VOR navigation beacon at the airport which is still in operation and heavily used today by private, commercial, and military aircraft. Airline service at the airport ended in the mid-1980's.



2003 Aerial Photo of Greenwood County Airport  
(from Greenwood County GIS)

## John H. "Luke" Williamson

As mentioned earlier, the first known “landing strip” in Greenwood County was on a farm owned by H. B. and Mattie Dyson Williamson on Rt. 34 east of Ninety Six, SC. A son, John Henry “Luke” Williamson, was born on April 18, 1906, and raised in Ninety Six. In 1927 Luke entered the U. S. Army as an Air Cadet, finished in 1928, and became an instructor of cadets at Brooks Field, TX. The 14<sup>th</sup> Air Force Historical Office Staff would later write *“He was one of the finest instructors ever stationed at Brooks Field – or any field as far as that goes – smooth pilot, took great pains in explaining things to cadets. All the pupils were crazy about him.”* Luke then went to work for Delta Airlines in 1929-30. He soon went back to active duty in the Army Air Corp in 1930 as an instructor at the Air Corp Tactical School (ACTS) at Maxwell Field, AL (later Maxwell AFB). While an Air Cadet and instructor, Luke would fly his Boeing P-12 bi-plane back to his family home in Ninety-Six, perform acrobatics for the locals, and land next to his

family home on an airstrip he had prepared for this purpose. Senator John Drummond, as a young boy, recalls hearing the airplane and running to the strip along with others to watch the aerobatics, and to hopefully see Luke and touch the airplane. Thus, Luke is attributed with having established the first airstrip in the Greenwood/Ninety-Six area.

In 1932, in reaction to the existence of the Navy's acrobatic flying team, the "Navy Hell Divers", Claire Chennault was ordered by his superiors to form an acrobatic team at Maxwell for the Army Air Corp. All pilots at Maxwell Field were invited to be tested for this team by trying to follow Chennault through various difficult aerobatic maneuvers. Only 3 pilots passed these tests, one of them being Luke Williamson. The other two were William "Billy" MacDonald, and Haywood "Possum" Hansell. Hansell started with the trio, but MacDonald took over when Hansell decided to go to transport school. Luke Williamson and Chennault were part of the trio from beginning to end. First named the "Dixie Trio", they soon became dubbed "The Flying Trapeze". The Flying Trapeze flew bi-wing Boeing P-12's in their performances. They toured the United States performing at various air shows and air races, and became the "sensation of the country". The three flew together "as of a single mind", and on occasion were known to take off, perform stunts, and land with unbroken 10-foot cables joining each other's wing tips. Their final performance was in Miami, FL in December 1935 at the All-American Air Races where they stole the show. Colonel Mao Pangchu of China was in attendance at this show and was so impressed that following the show he offered McDonald and Williamson lucrative positions in China as advisors and instructors for the Chinese Air Force. They resigned their positions in the Army Air Service Reserves and went to China. (Chennault would join them later.)

Luke became an aviation advisor to Madame Chiang Kai Shek (who was the person who actually commanded the Chinese Air Force), eventually flew with Chennault in the American Volunteer Group (AVG), predecessor to "The Flying Tigers", flew transports "over the hump", and later for almost 2 years in Europe when the U.S. entered WWII. Returning home in 1942, he rejoined Delta Airlines, became their Chief Check Pilot, and kept that position until he died in Atlanta of a stroke in 1957.

Col. John Henry "Luke" Williamson was a native South Carolinian that truly loved aviation, and made it his career from a young age until his death. He was obviously highly skilled at his profession, and his skills were recognized by his country and his superiors. According to a grand nephew who knew him for a short while, he was a humble and kind man, the kind of man that did not seek recognition, but loved flying, his country, his God, and his family. He is buried alongside his wife Mary (Sealy) Williamson in a small picturesque stone-walled cemetery in an overgrown wooded area off Rt. 702 near Ninety-Six, SC. His epitaph reads "One of the Flying Trapeze".

Luke was inducted into the South Carolina Aviation Hall of Fame at a banquet and ceremony on February 9, 2006 during the South Carolina Aviation Association (SCAA) Convention in Myrtle Beach. Each year the SCAA calls for nominees for their Hall of Fame. The South Carolina Aviation Hall of Fame was established in 1991. It is intended to honor outstanding leaders in South Carolina aviation. Luke Williamson was

nominated to be a 2006 inductee by Broadus M. “Bo” Bowman of Greenwood, SC. Bo Bowman’s nomination of Luke was supported by SC Senator John Drummond who is himself a native and resident of Ninety Six, and a decorated former WWII fighter pilot.



Luke Williamson (right) as a member of “The Flying Trapeze”  
(Claire Chennault in center)





Luke Williamson as Pilot and Officer in WWII



Luke Williamson as Chief Check Pilot for Delta Airlines

## **The Greenwood Lake B-25 Bomber Incident**

On June 6, 1945 (also D-Day) a twin-engine B-25 bomber (Serial Number 41-13285), on a training flight out of the Army Air Field in Greenville, SC (now Donaldson Center) ditched into the southeast end of Lake Greenwood. This B-25 was recovered from the lake over 38 years later on August 5, 1983. The recovery was largely organized, and likely funded by, Matt Self. Matt is one of the members of the well-known and philanthropic Self family in Greenwood. The B-25 was first transported to our Greenwood County Airport, but it was later taken to Columbia with the intention of eventually being restored and put into the SC State Museum. However, as of 2006, this has not yet been completed. It is at this time in storage in a WWII era hangar at Columbia's Owens Downtown Airport. It was repaired enough to be put on display for the Doolittle's Raiders 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in Columbia in 1992.

In 2005 Bo Bowman located and spoke at length with the man who was piloting the B-25 when it went into the lake. His name is Daniel Rossman, and he currently (2006) resides in Roswell, GA. According to Dan, he was one of two students that were training with an instructor in the B-25 that day. The other student was Walter "Blackie" F. Wallace, and the instructor was John J. Jackson. Dan was at the controls at the time of the incident, the other student having had his turn at the controls earlier. Two other Army Air Service men were also on board the aircraft. Their names were Preston S. Alexander and John J. Benna, reportedly listed as the Flight Engineer and Gunner, respectively.

Over the years there has been a legend of sorts that the pilots in the B-25 were distracted by, and were perhaps showing off for, some young ladies sunbathing on the shore nearby. Upon questioning, Dan Rossman denies that this story is true. He said they were simply buzzing the lake too low (and had been doing this for a while) when the airplane propellers touched the water surface and caused it to slow down and go into the water. Quite often they would practice low flying to simulate the avoidance of "flak" during battle. His greatest fear was possibly hitting the dam, but they came nowhere near doing this. The airplane stayed afloat for only eight minutes according to Dan, but all five men were able to get out of the airplane and to the shore. The owner of the nearby Panorama Restaurant picked them up in a small boat and took them back to the shore at the restaurant. They suffered some injuries, were given emergency treatment in a local hospital, and then transported back to the Greenville Army Air Base. Although hospitalized, Dan, "Blackie" and John were all three placed under "house arrest". Dan and the other student were exonerated in the subsequent court marshal, but Dan recalls that the instructor was grounded, stripped of his wings, and "demoted to the ranks". Bo Bowman also had a discussion with one of the "young ladies" reportedly sunbathing on the dock, Mrs. Becky (Kennedy) McDaniel of Ninety Six. She said that she and a few other girls were on a nearby dock that day and saw the B-25 go into the lake, but that she "was not sure" that it was buzzing them. However, as Mrs. McDaniel said, "It made a good story".

# After 39 years, plane rises from its watery grave

The B-25 is suspended from a crane on the Lake Greenwood beach behind the Panorama Restaurant and Lodge

**GREENWOOD** — Though they had to put in an extra day at Lake Greenwood, members of the Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit of the U.S. Navy recovered today a downed B-25 airplane in three last Saturday afternoon.

The plane had been lying beneath 40 feet of water since it crashed in Lake Greenwood June 9, 1941, when the 11th Army Air Corps' bomber on board crashed on the water near the beach on the lake's shore.

The unit towed the 1940s-era plane in tow from its crash site to a crane behind the Panorama Restaurant and Lounge waterfront. The plane was hoisted by the crane and the plane was brought to land Sunday.

"This took 45 days and 100 hours in the water," Lt. Commander Clyde Thrift said.

When the unit first came to the plane from the crash about 12 m. Saturday, the most serious of the wings began to give away and the winging had to be hoisted by several hoists, which a new plane was hoisted.

"On the first try, the B-25 was hoisted out the strength members, then passing through the wings

**By Laura Hubbard**  
**On the**  
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**BB** The Greenville News — GREENVILLE, PYDMONT Sunday, August 7, 1983

**Plane**

The plane's pretty much gone now," he said.

Though the plane's starboard engine was missing, a Gringall fuel

new home, the Greenwood County Airport. There, members of the Airport Commission had Greenwood Aviation Association plan to

Anna Kani, 68, remembered the day the plane crashed and told Pilot. Several divers usually where to find it

Drivers did find the new pilot's name — F. J. Wilson — engraved in the rocks.

Removing the plane from its wreckage resulted from its being

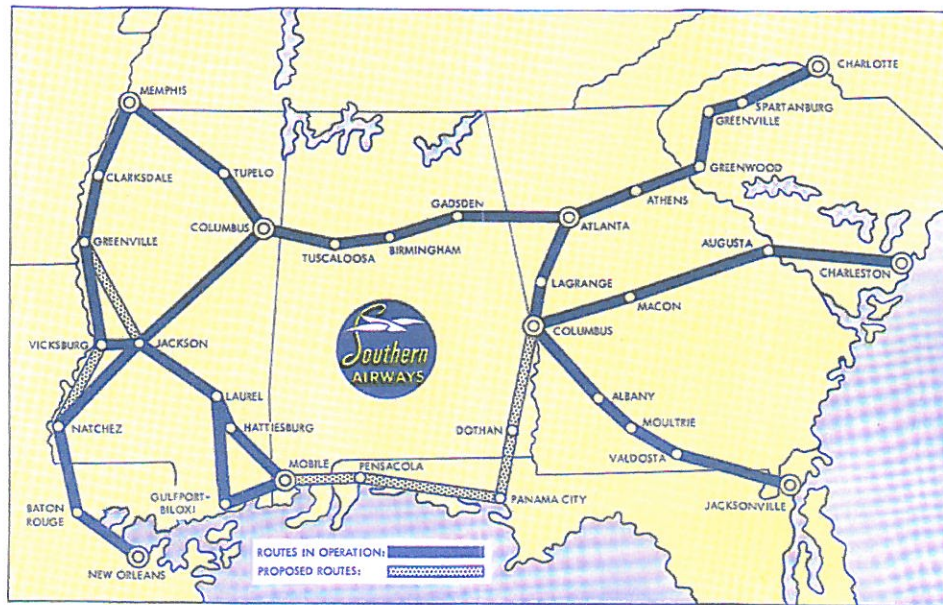
strongly the plane was going to be taken

The plane was then cleaned and painted, and a 1000-ton crane was used to lift it from the water of Lake Greenwood.

## Airlines that Served Greenwood



Southern Airways initiated airline service to the new Greenwood County Airport in August 1949. In it's first month of operation Southern boarded 39 passengers. In 1953 the year's total was 855 passengers, and in 1956 it was 1,677. Although Southern Airways never achieved their passenger goals, they continued to serve Greenwood until August 1974. Air Carolina provided service from April 1975 until February 1977, but stopped service, again because of the lack of sufficient passengers and freight to make the venture worthwhile. Bankair tried to make a go of it for and brief period in 1978, and Atlantis in 1983, but both ventures were short-lived. There have been no airlines serving Greenwood since 1983.



Route Map, June 15, 1952

1952 Route Map for Southern Airways (includes Greenwood)

### **Waymon Lanford**

A history of aviation in Greenwood County would not be complete without a discussion of Waymon Lanford who was active in aviation throughout most of the events previously discussed. Waymon, a native of Spartanburg County, was born in 1915 and was into aviation fulltime in 1941, first as a mechanic, and beginning in 1945 as a pilot. He went on to be an FAA licensed mechanic, an aircraft inspector, flying instructor, and flying services operator. He started at the Chinquapin airport (Johnson Field) working for Luther Johnson, and later operated his own Lanford Flying Service at the Greenwood County Airport from 1954 until 1981. He has built, repaired, and flown many airplanes, and taught many a person in Greenwood of all ages how to fly. In 1995 Waymon was presented with the prestigious "FAA Master Mechanic" Award. Waymon still lives near the airport on Northside Drive at the time of this writing (2006)

### **Summary**

Like many small towns and cities throughout the U. S. in the 1920's, Greenwood hosted the early barnstormers. Typically, they would select a farmer's field for their temporary base of operations. They would then fly around the town in their open-cockpit biplanes performing low passes and stunts to draw the residents' attention, and then go back to their field and await the arrival of enthusiastic passengers ready to spend a few dollars for a ride in a "flying machine". At the request of local officials, in October 1927 Charles A. Lindberg circled Greenwood twice in "The Spirit of St. Louis" and dropped a "letter of greeting" for the people of Greenwood. This was during his Guggenheim Tour of the U.S. only five months after his history-making flight across the Atlantic. This event officially opened the 1927 Piedmont Fair in Greenwood.

Although Greenwood was primarily a railroad town, its forefathers took an early interest in aviation and its future. Greenwood established its first "municipal airport" in 1929, before many other towns and cities gave such an action any consideration. This airport was replaced by a second and larger municipal airport just off of Chinquapin Road. in 1936. County officials worked hard to assure that Greenwood was selected for the location of one of the U.S. Army's many new training airfields during WWII. Coronaca Army Airfield was constructed in 1942. When the war was over, county officials worked equally as hard to bring about the donation of this airfield to the county in 1947. This set the stage for an era of airline service to Greenwood during the period of 1949-1983. The carrier for the largest portion of this time was Southern Airways. Although only one of its three original runways is now maintained, the Greenwood County Airport continues to serve private and corporate pilots and airplanes.

In June 1945, a B-25 bomber on a training flight out of Greenville, swept too close to the water surface and ditched into Lake Greenwood. In 1983, a group of persons spearheaded by Matt Self, found and raised the B-25 which is now partially restored and in a hangar at Owen Field in Columbia, SC.

A number of other unique personalities and events over the years contributed to Greenwood's aviation history. In 1929 the Index Journal was delivered by air to Ninety Six by two of the newspaper's editors and their barnstormer pilot. John "Luke" Williamson of Ninety Six became an Army Air Cadet in 1927, became a member of the first touring Army Air Service Aerobatic team, "The Flying Trapeze", a predecessor to "The Thunderbirds". Later Luke was key in the forming the Chinese National Air Force, and after the war was a chief pilot for Delta Airlines. He was nominated by this writer for the South Carolina Aviation Hall of Fame and was inducted in 2006. Waymon Lanford, who still resides in Greenwood, ran an Air Services business at the Greenwood County Airport from 1954 until 1981 and rebuilt and repaired hundreds of airplanes, and taught hundreds of persons from the Greenwood area to fly during his career.

There is no question that Greenwood has been alive to aviation from the early 1920's until the present day. It is hoped that our Greenwood County officials will keep this spirit alive in the years to come.

Broadus M. (Bo) Bowman, June 2006